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THE RURAL HEALTH MOVEMENT.

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Rural and Urban Health.—In the popular conception, rural life is more healthful than urban, and people have considerable to say about the “pure fresh country air.” Unfortunately, however, fresh air is only one of the factors necessary for health, and by itself “fresh air” will not overcome our great national sanitary crime of “soil pollution.” In plain unvarnished Anglo-Saxon, “fresh air” will not make up for the absence of a privy on 55.3 per cent. of the 4,822 American farm homes, in about 200 different localities, of which I have records.

In rural districts, medical attention is not as a rule so easily available as in cities, partly because of the long distances, partly because of poor roads, partly for other reasons, and in general the same standard of medical attention is relatively more expensive; free clinics are practically unknown, district nursing almost unheard of and hospital advantages rare, as compared with these advantages in the cities. Further, while the urban inhabitants receive more or less protection on the part of local boards of health, the inhabitants of the open country scarcely know what a health officer is, except in case of an outbreak of smallpox. In the city, the average American woman has the services of a physician in case of child-birth; in the rural districts the average American woman, so far as I have been able to learn, is not protected by medical attention at such time.

Origin of the Present Movement.—For more than two decades past, the American government has shown a keen interest in the health of the farmers’ swine, but it remained for ex-President Roosevelt to initiate a more active interest in the health of the farmers’ wives and children. Roosevelt’s Commission on Country Life was in fact the real starting point of the present nation-wide active movement for a betterment of health conditions in our open country. Naturally there was certain preliminary work in this line in various places, especially by some of the state boards of health, and there

were certain investigations into rural medical conditions, especially by the boards of health of Georgia and Florida, and by the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Labor, and the Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service. But it was President Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life, despite the ridicule heaped upon it by part of the daily press, that opened the eyes of persons in many states interested in agriculture to the self-evident fact that the life of the wife of the poorer farmer is not what it is so often thought to be and that her health is more important than that of the swine. Among the many indirect results of the work of the Country Life Commission must be included the tremendously increased activity on the part of at least nine state boards of health.

Status of Rural Sanitation.—If any one wishes to see how far behind the present status of sanitary science this country really is, he should visit a number of small farms and note under what condition the milk is kept; he should examine the toilet facilities and see how the flies infect the "fresh country milk" with human feces; how poor the ventilation is; how, for instance, the death rate from tuberculosis would be even greater than it is at present, were it not that some fresh air does enter the house because of cracks between the boards.

These conditions are not typical for any one particular part of the country and for that section alone, although they are accentuated in localities with more than one race, as in those sections where the Chinaman, the Indian, the Japanese, the Mexican, and the Negro are found in numbers. It is popularly supposed that one must go to the mountains of North Carolina to find really wretched sanitary conditions; but this popular idea was shattered to atoms by the Commission on Country Life as it brought out the facts of the unsanitary conditions of the so-called "bunk-houses" on some of the California fruit ranches, or of some of the conditions just this side of the Canadian border, or in Illinois, or in Nebraska and Iowa, and of the miserable hovels of the Mexican "Greaser." Any sanitary missionary in any part of the country can find enough to keep him busy for some time if he undertakes to improve the sanitary conditions of the farms within a radius of ten miles of his home—the farms which are supplying his table with milk, butter, berries, celery, lettuce, and with these, human excreta. That the conditions in

question are not present on some of the large and rich estates is to be admitted. That they are present and the rule on the poorer and even on the average farm can not be truthfully denied. In fact, the sanitary crimes, especially the great crime of soil pollution, are so flagrant that to the practiced eye they are often recognizable even from the window of a car as the train passes through a given district. Soil pollution is evident between New Haven and Boston; near Lake Sunapee; it extends across to the Pacific, down to lower California, eastward to Florida, northward to Maine; but it increases in degree and danger as soon as the population becomes mixed, and as the warmer climates are approached.

In some states, the sanitation surrounding the rural schools is, relatively speaking, excellent, but in many of our states rural school sanitation is a disgrace to our land. The church sanitation is usually, so far as my observations go, very, very far inferior to that of the public schools and indicates that the average rural clergyman has forgotten the advice given in Deut. 23. 12-13.

Result of Rural Insanitary Conditions.—Typhoid fever is a typical filth disease. Any person who contracts typhoid has recently swallowed some germs from the urine or feces of some other person. Flies are typically filth animals, as they breed and feed in and on filth, notably horse and human excreta. Let any one think how common flies are in the average American dining room and kitchen and he can form some slight conception of the coprophagous habit of the American nation. In the cities, the sewer system decreases both the number and the danger of flies; in the rural districts, where the sewer is replaced by the privy, which is rarely cleaned, and where almost every house is near a manure pile, flies abound, water is in general more of a luxury, coprophagy, unintentional of course, naturally increases, and with this there is an increase of filth diseases, such as typhoid; further, there is likely to be an increase in all soil pollution diseases, such as amebic dysentery, Cochin China diarrhea, hookworm diseases, etc. The personal habits of the average farmer are not so clean as those of the urbanite; spitting is general, chewing and snuff taking common, especially in certain districts, and as a result when, as is more common than popularly supposed, a case of tuberculosis occurs in the family the disease is likely to spread rapidly.

Conservatism of Rural Population.—The conservatism of the rural population is proverbial. It need not therefore be expected that conditions will be changed in a day. In fact, it will take at least a generation to bring rural sanitation to where it should be. The American farmer, at least in my experience, is not abnormally concerned about the health of his wife and children, whatever may be his solicitude for the health of his mares, cows, and sows. The farmer's wife, however, is deeply interested in the health of her children, and it is chiefly through the wife and children that a change in the present, often medieval, conditions will be brought about.

Plan of Campaign.—The most striking point in regard to the present campaign for improvement in rural conditions is the way the health officers and the school teachers have made friends and are working together. Of 77,127 answers to the question "Are the sanitary conditions on the farms in your locality satisfactory?" those from the school teachers came nearest to the real conditions as evidenced by the typhoid death rate. The present miserable sanitary conditions of the school houses are not due to the teachers but to the school boards. The rural school teachers are teaching sanitation in plain English and are eager to learn more that they may impart to the rising generation, and when, say fifty years from now, the history of the present movement for improved rural sanitation is written, there are certain persons who will be generally recognized as the people who made it possible, who launched it, and who carried it out. Were I to prophesy who would be mentioned in this connection I would say: Theodore Roosevelt, John D. Rockefeller, Walter Wyman, the field men of the various boards of health, and the rural school teachers.

A Great Need.—Aside from the factors at work in various parts of the country, looking to better rural sanitation in general, there are a few, *very, very* few, rural district nurses, and a few Y. M. C. A. rural secretaries who are doing work of a more special nature, the former helping the mothers and girls, the latter helping the men. Both of these movements are really in their infancy, but they both deserve the greatest good will and encouragement on the part of all people. The influence for good of a sensible rural "district nurse" is enough to make any person wish he were a millionaire for the one purpose of endowing this movement, one of the newest welfare policies.